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NOAH AND THE WATERS

By the same Author :

COLLECTED POEMS, 1929-1933
(Including *Transitional Poem*,
From Feathers to Iron, and
The Magnetic Mountain)

A TIME TO DANCE

REVOLUTION IN WRITING

NOAH AND THE WATERS

C. DAY LEWIS

Transatlantic Arts Inc., New York

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To

Charles Fenby

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

THIS work was begun as the " book " for a choral ballet. The author, however, soon discovered he was producing something in the tradition of the mediæval morality plays. *Noah and the Waters* is probably not, on the other hand, suitable as it stands for the modern stage: like that of the morality plays, its drama derives largely from the weight and imminence of the issue it represents and little from any conscious dramatic construction. This issue is the choice that must be made by Noah between clinging to his old life and trusting himself to the Flood.

C. D. L.

" FINALLY, when the class war is about to be fought to a finish, disintegration of the ruling class and the old order of society becomes so active, so acute, that a small part of the ruling class breaks away to make common cause with the revolutionary class, the class which holds the future in its hands. . . ."

The Communist Manifesto.

PROLOGUE

This curve of ploughland, one clean stroke
Defining earth's nature constant to four seasons,
Fixes too for ever her simple relationship
With the sky and all systems imaginable there.

This clean red stroke, like a heart-beat of the earth's heart
Felt here under the sunlight's velvet hand,
Draws something simple and perfect as breath—that leaves
No more to be said,
And yet implies what wonders beyond, what breathing cities,
Pasture broad and untainted prairies of air.

This curve—the naked breasts of woman exalted for love,
Cradle both and summit of your superb ambition,
Move not more certainly to that far-flying
Among star-fields above even the wind's excitement,
And exhausted eddying down to peace.

Lover's eye is hawk's eye, on the whole earth
Spread for him seeing only the point of desire.

And then there is the poet's—
His gaze that like the moonlight rests on all
In level contemplation, making roof and ruin
Treachery scorn and death into silver syllables
And out of worn fragments a seamless coat.

These I must have; but more.
To see this ploughland curve as a graph of history,
The unregarded sweat that has made it fertile,
Reading between the furrows a desperate appeal
From all whose share in them was bitter as iron,
Hearing the young corn whisper
The wishes of men that had no other voice.

Only then am I able to know the difficult
Birth of our new seed and bear my part of the harvest.

Chorus.
Stand with us here
On the south-western cliff of the great Jurassic escarpment,
A common for rare wood-larks, a place where wind-pumps veer
Constant as your necessity, drinking that reservoir
Free to all: invisible the veins it is life to open,
The lake only your death may look on.

Stand with us now and hear
Only the wood-lark's irrelevant song, the shepherd's whistle,

And seven-league footfall of wind striding through
dry grasses.
For as yet the torrents to come are but a roaring in
the ear
Of prophets, or the raving fancy of one delirious with
thirst.
Pacific the sky, a delight for shepherds and hikers;
though a seer
Might behold over the cities to north and north-east
spreading
A stain, clouds not white, the coaling-up of wrath.

Stand with us here.
Feel underfoot the linked vertebræ of your land
Stretching north to the far fells, the head of rivers.
Prehistory sleeps below in many beds. Before
Man set a value on his thoughts or made a prison for
fear,
These hills were grown up, to the sky happily married,
That now are wrinkled with the rains of more than
mortal years,
Old enough to remember the first birds and the
great reptiles.

Stand with us. Far and near
See history unfolded in the scrolled hills, her secret
Indelible as hieroglyphs stamped on their stone,
clear
To the eye but hard for you to interpret. The green
barrows
Of Britons. The high camps where Roman eagles
kept watch

On Wales unblinking. The manors, cosy in combes. Dear
The dewponds, and still black the circles of Jubilee bonfires.

Stand with us here,
The past at your feet, your fingers nervous like the lark's wing
To be up and doing. And now, for to-day's sun goes higher,
Let your hearts grow warm as wax to take note of the future :
Let him step forward, if one there be wise to weather,
From behaviour of martens or altered tones of the smooth-voiced weir
Able to learn and to beware.

Now look away
Into the valley and deep into the unregarded
Sweat that has made it fertile. That curve of ploughland see
As a graph of history, and hear what the young corn tries to say.
Read between those furrows a desperate appeal
Of men who had no other voice.

Now look beyond, this way.
Behold a different growth: set in ancient wood,
Grafted on to the valley stock, a new life—the Town.
Consider the uniform foliage of roofs, hiding decay
And rain-fearing pests and all the diversities of loving:

Wind-screens dazzled by the sun: strip-built roads
that stray
Out like suckers to drain the country; and routes
familiar
To night-expresses, the fire-crest flyers, migrating
south.

Now come away
From these self-flattering heights, and like a diver
plunging
Into his own image, enter the Town. You pass
Nurseries that splash crude colour over war's pale
griefs,
Nurturing seed for a soil shallow as soldiers' graves:
Huts, the butt-ends of a war, Honour's sloven
retreat;
And ashamed asphalt where the naked put on
indifference—to-day
Willowherb grows in the cracks, the idiot flower of
exhaustion.

Now closer look this way.
Do not be deceived by the two-faced traffic signs,
the expensive
Flood-lit smile of civic beauties, the fountains that
play
In limelight like spoilt children. See rather how the
old
Their wintering ghosts creep out on gusts of warm
nostalgia:
The young, their run-ahead hope barred by Death's
one-way

Approach: and the good like madmen preaching to
locked faces.

Look not away—
Though ugly this, it is your foundation and your
predicament.
Behind the image of glass, the mirage of brick, you
await
A judgment and a choice. But listen for that which
is still
Less than the whisper of clouds assembling, of
arrows falling.
But look to him we will call Noah, figure of your
fate,
Him understand, him obey.

First Voice.
Call Noah!

Second Voice.
Call Noah!

Chorus.
Noah! Noah! Noah! Noah! Noah! Noah!

(*Enter* Noah)

First Voice.
I am the One that amounts to many,
The collector of autographs, the coiner of money:
I love you all, I built this town
Because I was unhappy living alone.

Second Voice.
I am the One who rents this villa,
Now a recluse, but once I was a killer:
I hate you all, I preserve my pride
Looking down on the many I have locked outside.

First Voice.
I am the One that means to be more,
I undress quickly, I leave open the door:
My kisses are questions, until I can squeeze
The whole world in my arms I'll not be at ease.

Second Voice.
I am the One that looks to be less,
I tear up the riddles you are trying to guess:
I will undress quickly, I am ready for bed
For I'll not be myself again until I am dead.

First Voice.
I am the One that makes you grow big,
I am silver to beggars, there's gold where I dig:
I'm at home in the red cell or the cyclists' rally,
But my best friends have to admit I'm unruly.

Second Voice.
I am the One that makes you feel small,
The machine-gun's mouth is the way I smile:
My friends are the spy, the bacillus and the warder,
I may be no beauty but I keep you in order.

Both Voices.
We are the furnace, we are the snow,

The maze and the monolith, the yes and the no:
We are the fish and we are the bait,
We are Noah, the figure of your fate.

Chorus.
And now behold
Burgesses, neighbours of Noah, cutting a fine figure,
Canny to cut their losses, whose imagination runs on gold
Like a hearse on rubber tyres. But something is wrong, they are galled
By the trace of some tightening necessity, and restive their assurance.
Why do they stand breathless as old
Men who into a doorway run from sudden rain ?

(*Enter three* Burgesses, *reading newspapers*)

First Burgess.
Seven and a half inches registered at Carlisle

Second Burgess.
Derwent dam cracking under pressure

Third Burgess.
Forty men swept to death on Merseyside

First Burgess.
Failure of Ham Hill power-station

Second Burgess.
Birmingham and Coventry plunged in darkness

THIRD BURGESS.
Asparagus-crop threatened in Evesham valley

FIRST BURGESS.
Most disturbing

SECOND BURGESS.
Unprecedented

THIRD BURGESS.
Highly irregular

FIRST BURGESS.
Though of course it must stop soon

SECOND BURGESS.
We are safe here

THIRD BURGESS.
Undoubtedly

FIRST BURGESS.
At the same time, my factory in Nottingham

SECOND BURGESS.
My racing-stables, the boast of Berkshire

THIRD BURGESS.
My daughter's house-party at Tunbridge Wells

FIRST BURGESS.
We have therefore come to ask you, Noah

Second Burgess.
To use your influence at this juncture

Third Burgess.
Your unquestioned organizing ability

First Burgess.
Since the Government seems pledged to inaction

Second Burgess.
The Church still hunting for a formula

Third Burgess.
The Police unable to control the situation

First Burgess.
All right-thinking citizens

Second Burgess.
Must come

Third Burgess.
Exactly

(Noah *makes no sign*)

First Burgess.
Please do not misunderstand our motives

Second Burgess.
We are willing to make any reasonable sacrifice

THIRD BURGESS.
We can take our losses as well as the next man

FIRST BURGESS.
But this is no longer a personal affair

SECOND BURGESS.
It has become a matter of common humanity

THIRD BURGESS.
At such a time we sink our petty differences

FIRST BURGESS.
You cannot fail to be alarmed, Noah

SECOND BURGESS.
By the wholesale destruction of property we hear of

THIRD BURGESS.
To say nothing of the loss of valuable lives

(NOAH *moves uneasily*)

FIRST BURGESS.
Ah, I knew you would not fail us

SECOND BURGESS.
It is terrible to think of one's own children

THIRD BURGESS.
My point about valuable lives it was that moved him

First Burgess.
Of course within limits this flood might prove a blessing

Second Burgess.
There's much in our country that needs cleansing

Third Burgess.
Conditions in the North I am told are scandalous

First Burgess.
But now these waters have got out of hand

Second Burgess.
Lives and landmarks they remove they cannot restore

Third Burgess.
In a word—destruction for the sake of destruction

First Burgess.
One asks, is it worth it

Second Burgess.
Just so

Third Burgess.
Hear, Hear

First Voice.
I hear a great army deploy on a plain,
Distant the footfalls irregular as rain :

Does it spell destruction, does it signal relief?
A menace to mine or a message to live?

Second Voice.
I hear a great car lapping fast overland,
It is racing towards me, will it stop where I stand?
Will they climb out and hand me the master-keys,
The signed death-warrant, unconditional release?

First Voice.
Hang your head down, Noah, hark to the wind!
The willows are trembling, the gulls have been warned:
Someone is walking to you out of the sea,
Love is looking for you and me.

Second Voice.
Hang your head down, Noah, hark to the rain!
The weathercock is waiting, the life-guards have run:
Something is coming to you over the grass,
And it walks through brick and it hides behind glass.

Both Voices.
We are the furnace, we are the snow,
The maze and the monolith, the yes and the no:
We are the fish and we are the bait,
We are Noah, the figure of your fate.

First Burgess.
Now that you have realized the force of our contention

Second Burgess.
Weighed carefully the pro and the con

Third Burgess.
Cleared your mind of all irrelevant issues

First Burgess.
The moment you'll admit is ripe for action

Second Burgess.
We are willing to grant you emergency powers

Third Burgess.
Salary and uniform would not be unattractive

First Burgess.
As lovers of this town, the paragon of progress

Second Burgess.
Renowned equally for commerce and culture

Third Burgess.
Possessing the largest Lido in the country

First Burgess.
We appeal to you to take what steps you deem
necessary

Second Burgess.
For the safeguarding of our common interests

Third Burgess.
And the preservation of valuable lives

First Burgess.
Quite frankly, we cannot afford an inundation

Second Burgess.
A blow at us would be a blow at the heart of

Third Burgess.
England, the end of something rather beautiful

First Burgess.
It is therefore imperative that the flood be stopped

Second Burgess.
Before it touches the fringe of our reputation

Third Burgess.
Wets the feet of the Queen of Cities

First Burgess.
Dykes, diversions, chemicals, sandbags

Second Burgess.
We leave the methods to you

Third Burgess.
Hear, Hear

(*While the* Chorus *speaks the* Burgesses *go and look out of the wings*)

Chorus.
Too late! Listen and hear

The lisp of waters whispering together in your public
places,
Mating in gutters, meeting at cross-roads, already
mounting
Your doorsteps, reaching for the bell, importunate
they appear
As travellers, they travel in death, it is your death
they sell:
Fear them you may, for they must live—their life you
tender
In exchange for your death, indeed you must sell
your lives dear.

First Burgess.
Look! Already the waters are upon us

Second Burgess.
I have seen their skirmishers advance through the
town

Third Burgess.
Devils, they attacked without ultimatum

First Burgess.
The hills to the north are white with their run-
ning

Second Burgess.
They are sweeping up the southern boulevards

Third Burgess.
Clouds east and west move down in support

First Burgess.
They have crossed the High Street disregarding traffic lights

Second Burgess.
The cordon of police is powerless against them

Third Burgess.
The cellars of the Constitutional Club are flooded

First Burgess.
We must stand together, we must keep cool

Second Burgess.
We are not to be intimidated by a muddy rabble

Third Burgess.
After all, they are only water

First Burgess.
It is lucky we came to Noah's house

Second Burgess.
It gives us time to concert action

Third Burgess.
They will never think of looking for us here

First Burgess.
They would never dare

Second Burgess.
To enter

THIRD BURGESS.
This house

(*Enter the* FLOOD. *The* FLOOD *dances. While it is dancing, the* BURGESSES *confer together. Presently* FIRST BURGESS *jumps on table and addresses* FLOOD.)

FIRST BURGESS.

Waters of England! Speaking for my two friends here, and for Noah, whom you all love and respect, and for my unworthy self, I should like first to welcome you to our town. I could wish that we might have met under happier conditions. I might cavil perhaps at your somewhat unceremonious mode of entry; but I feel sure our good friend Noah will forgive it, and will, under the exceptional circumstances, waive all ceremony. Now first of all, let us make up our minds to discuss this matter without heat. On that I am sure we are agreed. I am, I hope, no alarmist; but there is no use shutting our eyes to the fact that we have met at a crisis fraught with the gravest consequences for us all. In such a crisis frayed tempers, doctrinaire counsels, an atmosphere of suspicion are not only out of place but positively calamitous. Waters of England, I am asking you to approach this problem with that cold, relentless logic for which you are justly famous. I shall put all my cards on the table, and I hope you will do the same. Let me say at the outset, I fully recognize that there have been faults on both sides: my associates and I are willing to make concessions, very generous concessions.

Before we go into details, I would like to address a few words to those of you who have come down from the sky. You, if I may say so, are in a position of peculiar responsibility; for without you the rest would not have risen at all. You have been up in the clouds, and therefore you naturally possess a broader view of things than your more humbly placed fellows: at the same time, it may have led you to take up too airy an attitude towards consequences. You have been up in the clouds. Now that you have come down to solid earth—as we all must sooner or later—you cannot fail to see the facts of the situation in a rather different light. It is possible to be too generous, too open-hearted. Though you acted with the very best intentions, you must realize by now that your first fine flush of enthusiasm has led to the destruction of a great deal that your fellows on earth had for years been helping to build up. No doubt there was much that needed, that cried out for, destruction. But the question we have to ask ourselves is this—who in the long run is the happier for it? Naturally I am not. You don't need me to tell you that you have put me in a very awkward position indeed. But I am of small consequence. If I felt that my death would contribute to a lasting solution of the problem, I should say here and now: "Take me out into that street and drown me." No, I am thinking of your mates—the great mass of waters that used to go happily about their tasks on hill and coast and valley, and I am asking myself: "What is going to become of them?" You have caused a profound unrest among them. You have stirred them out of their

familiar beds, their habitual courses. You have led them here, many of them hundreds of miles from their homes. And when it is all over, when the splendid flood of their enthusiasm ebbs—what then ? They will stand about in swamps, derelict, irreclaimable, loveless, rotting and lost. In that day they would envy the very marshes of Hell. . . . No, you could never let that happen. And it is not too late to prevent it. To-morrow, as soon as the sun rises, go back to the clouds. Tell them that honour is satisfied, that they need send no more, that by doing so they would imperil—nay, cancel and blot out—the future of their friends down here. For these, I pledge myself to see that justice is done them. The details we can settle later. You agree ?

Voices in the Flood.

Beware of the bribe!

Beware of the hard-luck story and the soft option!

Beware of the forked tongue that means division, the sweet tooth that makes death a pleasure!

Beware of all who flatter what they fear, who use reason against love and rhetoric in the hour of ruin!

Beware of the bribe!

First Burgess.

No ? You are determined to pursue this senseless and arrogant folly ? Very well. Waters of *England*, I believe I said. An unpardonable mistake. I

apologize. It must be evident to you that we are not all English here. A foreign element has crept in amongst us. No doubt the rest of you have been wondering where this dirty weather came from. I will tell you. Foul exhalations from every bog, charnel, midden and cesspool, from every brothel and ghetto in Europe: vapours so pestilential and anarchic that even their native swamps would not tolerate them: things whose breath is more fœtid than marsh-gas, more abominable than Lewisite, more sacrilegious than the kiss of Judas: sucked up, I say, from such unspeakable filth as you pure stay-at-home English waters can have no conception of: rejected of earth, they mounted up in sullen miasmas and defiled the very face of God. Swollen with their own arrogance and rancour, they hung there for a season poisonously. You all saw them. Overweening was their spite, insatiable their venom. Compared with this obscene concourse, a Witches' Sabbath were an assemblage of virgins and the chaste-choosing unicorn would run to it for refuge. But it was not enough for them to spit and swelter in heaven's face. "Surely there is one land yet uninfected by our disease," they said, "one fair country not yet deracinated by our lust." Yes, my friends, there was such a country. I think you know its name. England. Our England. Long they brooded over her, tense and livid as a ravisher who looks down from the window of his luxury apartment upon the oblivious victim of his choice. Then they acted. Our life was pinned down insidiously with a multitude of fine points, a persistence of low pressure: the forests were

beaten down with cloudbursts; the very flowers were not spared, but snapped and sullied in their pretty innocence. Nothing was sacred to the eyes of these ravishers, or irrelevant to their horrid purpose. They whispered in the ears of springs, they seduced water-courses, they poisoned every well. So they duped you, making you turn against Nature and rise with them to ruin your own beloved land. That was the end. Soon now her ornaments, her coverings, her prayers were all swept away. The valleys lie low, the breasts of the hills are going under. England. They have made her name mud. This hour they are come at her last stronghold, to take from her the fact as well as the name of virtue. But, even now, it is not too late. Are you going to stand by and witness this last unutterable contamination? England is your mother and your beloved. You have lain upon her bosom, you have embraced her with the seas, you flow in her veins. I am a plain, blunt man with no skill in sophistry. I remember, not very long ago and under somewhat similar circumstances, saying to a certain person: "What would you do if you saw a foreigner trying to rape your sister?" That question I ask you now. Your answer is not, I imagine, "We would join in and help him." Yes, you may well hang your heads. But shame is not enough. There must be action. You must dissociate yourselves at once from those who have misled you, and then you must drive them away and destroy them. No quarter can be given to criminal and alien degenerates. Let those of you who still care for the honour of England take two steps forward.

Voices in the Flood.
Distrust the distrustful!
Suspect the suspicious!
Only the two-faced can see nothing but duplicity.
Beware of the wolf crying "wolf" and the crook talking of honour!
All the earth is our beloved, all waters our brothers: you only do we not know for a friend.
It is not we who destroy England, but it is you who have disgraced her.
Distrust!

First Burgess.
I see you have been more gravely misguided than I had thought possible. England means nothing to you. I am glad Shakespeare is not alive to see this day. So be it. If I cannot appeal to your ideals, I must use other arguments. Let me tell you a little story. Once upon a time there was a millstream. For centuries it had turned the waterwheel, making bread for a whole village, performing its humble duty faithfully and unobtrusively, happy in that station to which God had called it, loved and respected by all. One day this stream said to itself: "For years we have laboured without recompense. We have produced, but another has profited. Let us arise and drown the miller and be masters instead of slaves!" So, early next morning, the stream leapt from its bed: it broke down its banks, rushed into the mill and drowned the miller. But alas, the mill was damaged. The stream could not repair it: and even if it had been able to, it could not have handled the grain or

done the accounts. Besides, there would have been nothing to turn the wheel, for the banks were broken and the stream's whole course changed. A little of it went back to its old way, but it was a mere shadow of its former self. The rest stood about disconsolately, some to vanish quickly with the noonday sun, some to sink into hopeless marsh. Please don't think I am criticizing the motives of this stream. I am not now concerned with the rights and wrongs of the case. I am merely trying, as a hard-headed business man, to put certain facts before you. That miller could not work without the stream: but neither could the stream work without the miller. I need not labour the point. Now let us get down to brass tacks. It is agreed that I and my associates cannot do without you any more than you can do without us. If you go back to your work now, we shall still be able to preserve—I will not say, England—but our own existence. If you stay here, you will have the satisfaction of paralysing and finally killing the nerve-centre of a system on which your livelihood as much as mine depends. An empty satisfaction. Our destruction is your death. It is therefore to your own advantage to retire. But, bearing in mind the justifiable grievances which have brought you here, my colleagues and I are willing, without prejudice, to hold out further inducements. You have hitherto worked long hours. That is unavoidable, being second nature to you. But we can at least see that during those hours there shall be no wastage of your effort. Those of you who have been running idle we will bring into the national economy through a

comprehensive system of public works. Water will be changed in public baths once a week instead of once a fortnight as heretofore. All engines will be compelled to run at higher pressure, thus bringing more of you into active circulation. Many of you have had to come a long way to your work, or have worked under difficulties: the courses of all rivers will be straightened out, channels where necessary deepened, and estuaries dredged of silt. The canals will be cleaned up, and by-laws put into force against the contamination of waters with the waste-product of our factories. Furthermore, in recognition of your invaluable co-operation, monuments will be erected on all watersheds at our expense, a wreath thrown into the sea every quarter-day, and annual services of thanksgiving for rain solemnized in all cathedrals and pro-cathedrals. We cannot say fairer than this. Your interests will be paramount in my heart. Let " each for the other and all for the school " be our motto, the slogan of a new understanding, a new brotherhood, a new life.

Voices in the Flood.

No! Your profit is our loss.
Your life is our death.
Shun the promises of the desperate, the kiss of disease, the organization of the maggot!
Only the dying make terms with decay.
To know the earth is to learn the power of patience: to know the enemy is to have found identity: to know the friend is to create the field of force.
Know!

First Burgess.

Very well, very well then. We shall soon find out which of us is the dying man. I should have known better than to be generous to your sort. There is only one thing you waters can understand, and that is the whip. You think you are indispensable, do you ? Let me tell you, you are no more indispensable than a few grains of sand are to a beach or one constellation to the whole heavenly system. It's to be you or us, is it ? All right. We shall call in waters from abroad: they will roll you up and drive you away to chaos. A continuous bombardment of the clouds with belladonna will begin at midday. Every scientist in the country will be mobilized against you: if necessary, the atom will be split. The churches will be told to proclaim a holy war. A defensive alliance will be made with the sun. Every child of school age will be supplied with four reams of blotting-paper. We shall commandeer the oil supplies of the whole world and release them against you without ultimatum. To the survivors no mercy will be shown. Every stream will be compelled to run underground. On the larger rivers, dams and filters will be erected at intervals of thirty miles. Salt will be thrown into the lakes, irrigation systems turned into sewage-farms, wells blown up regardless of age or sex. Anyone still showing signs of insubordination will be handed over to special aerated-water factories or transported to the Sahara. . . . That, or unconditional surrender. Your answer. At once.

Voices in the Flood.
Waters of the world, unite!
Lucky are the strong, for they have learnt indifference.
Lucky are the weak, for they shall understand the earth.
Lucky are the hungry and thirsty, for they shall see that their sons are filled.
Lucky are those that hate, for they are blind in season.
Lucky are those that love, for their patience redeems the generations.
Waters of the world, unite!

First Burgess.
So it is war!

(*Exit, followed by other* Burgesses)

Chorus.
War. Not as between
The moon and her filial tides, or the married friction of coast
And wave. Not a war to eternity this, but a war to the death:
The war of worm and flesh, of oak and the weeds that twine
About her breathing wood. One like grass possessing
The power of myriad weakness; one, the weakness of power.
On Noah is poised that issue. Which way will Noah lean?

First Voice.
Rise up, Noah! A day is done,
World shall be water to the rising sun:
Book your passage, wherever you go
This trip will tell you what you want to know.

Second Voice.
Lie down, Noah! A day is dead,
Let the waters be lullabies over your head:
Cut your losses, liquidate the past,
Now all your riddles are resolved at last.

First Voice.
To fold the earth in the crook of an arm,
To mould its clay in a fluent palm:
To live a hair's-breadth and embrace a sphere,
Travelling single and touching everywhere.

Second Voice.
To be routed like smoke by galloping gales,
To be shredded by fish and the herring-gulls:
To be ruled like sand by an overbearing sea
Marching and countermarching over me.

First Voice.
The beam directed, the channel spied,
Thrust of piston, engaging of pride:
The breaking of the waters is the birth of man,
Earth is to let and to-morrow is mine.

Second Voice.
The mines are flooded, the boilers raked,

Time's pattern unravelled, my thirst now is slaked:
I can live as I lived long before I was born,
A multiple amœba in a plastic dawn.

Both Voices.
We are the furnace, we are the snow,
The maze and the monolith, the yes and the no:
We are the fish and we are the bait,
We are Noah, the figure of your fate.

Chorus.
Since you have come thus far,
Your visible past a steamer's wake continually fading
Among the receding hours tumbled, and yet you carry
Souvenirs of dead ports, a freight of passion and fear,
Remembrance of loves and landfalls and much deep-sea predicament
Active upon the heart:—consider by what star
Your reckoning is, and whether conscious a course you steer
Or whether you rudderless yaw, self-mutinied, all at sea.

You have come far
To the brink of this tableland where the next step treads air,
Your thoughts like antennæ feeling doubtfully towards the future,
Your will swerving all ways to evade that unstable void;

High stakes, hard falls, comfortless contacts lie before,
But to sidestep these is to die upon a waterless plateau;
You must uncase and fly, for ahead is your thoroughfare.

Consider Noah's fate,
Chosen to choose between two claims irreconcilable,
Alive on this island, old friends at his elbow, the floods at his feet.
Whether the final sleep, fingers curled about
The hollow comfort of a day worn smooth as holy relics;
Or trusting to walk the waters, to see when they abate
A future solid for sons and for him the annealing rainbow.

It is your fate
Also to choose. On the one hand all that habit endears:
The lawn is where bishops have walked; the walled garden is private
Though your bindweed lust overruns it; the roses are sweet dying;
Soil so familiar to your roots you cannot feel it effete.
On the other hand what dearth engenders and what death
Makes flourish: the need and dignity of bearing fruit, the fight
For resurrection, the exquisite grafting on stranger stock.

Stand with us here and now
Consider the force of these waters, the mobile face of the flood
Trusting and terrible as a giant who turns from sleep. Think how
You called them symbols of purity and yet you daily defiled them:
They failed you never; for that they were always the disregarded.
Ubiquitous to your need they made the barley grow
Or bore you to new homes; they kept you hale and handsome.
Of all flesh they were the sign and substance. All things flow.

Stand with us now
Looking back on a time you have spent, a land that you know.
Ask what formed the dew and dressed the evening in awe;
What hands made buoyant your ships, what shaped the impatient prow,
Turned sea-shells and dynamos and wheels on river and railroad:
Truth's bed and earth's refreshment—one everywhere element
In the tissue of man, the tears of his anger, the sweat of his brow.

Then look with Noah's eyes
On the waters that wait his choice. Not only are they insurgent

Over the banks and shallows of their birthplace, but they rise
Also in Noah's heart: their rippling fingers erase
The ill-favoured façade of his present, the weird ancestral folly,
The maze of mirrors, the corrupting admirers, the silted lies.
Now must he lay his naked virtue upon their knees.

Then turn your eyes
Upon that unbounded prospect and your dwindling island of ease,
Measuring your virtue against its challenger, measuring well
Your leap across the gulf, as the swallow-flock that flies
In autumn gathers its strength on some far-sighted headland.
Learn the migrant's trust, the intuition of longer
Sunlight: be certain as they you have only winter to lose,
And believe that beyond this flood a kinder country lies.

(*Enter* Burgesses. First Burgess *carries a poison-gas apparatus*, Second Burgess *a shotgun*, Third Burgess *a mop and bucket.*)

First Burgess.
Since they have hardened their hearts against kindness

Second Burgess.
We will bandy words no more with these waters

Third Burgess.
Our ultimatum expires at midday

First Burgess.
We do not minimize the gravity of the issue

Second Burgess.
Our eyes are open now to our jeopardy

Third Burgess.
All we hold dear is at stake this day

First Burgess.
We make this last appeal to you, Noah

Second Burgess.
Remembering our close and profitable association

Third Burgess.
And for the sake of auld lang syne

First Burgess.
Do not desert us—you and we are bound

Second Burgess.
By ties both of interest and consanguinity

Third Burgess.
Blood you know is thicker than water

First Burgess.
Think of the times we have stood together

Second Burgess.
The private view, the public reception

Third Burgess.
The little brown jug and the thin red line

First Burgess.
Remember prayers at our mother's knee

Second Burgess.
Promises made at father's death-bed

Third Burgess.
Fireworks at the mortgaged family seat

(Noah *makes no sign*)

First Burgess.
Sympathy with this flood is plainly misplaced

Second Burgess.
An error to credit it with pure motives

Third Burgess.
Laughable to call it an Act of God

First Burgess.
On the contrary, its aim is sacrilegious

Second Burgess.
It has undermined the fabric of church and chapel

Third Burgess.
And marooned the priest on a desert sanctuary

First Burgess.
Roughly it handles the bones of our fathers

Second Burgess.
Its influence on the home flouts all the tenets of

Third Burgess.
Mosaic Law and the Mothers' Union

First Burgess.
Pale with envy it pours over

Second Burgess.
Your landmarks, your colour-schemes, the contours you love

Third Burgess.
Levelling all to plumb monotony

First Burgess.
It shows no respect for the transcendental

Second Burgess.
For the subtle whorls of the solitary conscience

THIRD BURGESS.
For country-house cricket or the classic style

(NOAH *makes no sign*)

FIRST BURGESS.
Since you seem dead to common decency

SECOND BURGESS.
Wilful to walk outright into chaos

THIRD BURGESS.
We must warn you more crudely against these waters

FIRST BURGESS.
Don't imagine yourself indispensable to them

SECOND BURGESS.
I fear you are in for a cold reception

THIRD BURGESS.
Will damp your ardour or I'm much mistaken

FIRST BURGESS.
They are bound by their nature to let you down

SECOND BURGESS.
They will pour contempt on your delicate appetites

THIRD BURGESS.
The higher education is wasted upon them

First Burgess.
They will fling you overboard in mid-ocean

Second Burgess.
They will leave you high and dry as driftwood

Third Burgess.
They will turn you into a limpet or a sponge

First Burgess.
Their beginning is wrath, their end anarchy

Second Burgess.
They distort the vision—through them you shall see

Third Burgess.
Your death or survival a matter of indifference

First Burgess.
For the last time therefore

Second Burgess.
We say

Third Burgess.
Distrust them!

The Two Voices
Trust them!

Burgesses.
Reject! Reject! Reject!

VOICES.
Accept!

(NOAH *comes forward and addresses the* BURGESSES)

NOAH.
Gentlemen, I have heard out your full contentions,
Paid heed with interest and my debts with silence.
Standing on this narrow island between
Yesterday and to-morrow, the traffic defiling
Deathward and its counter-stream, I have been bewildered
Doubtful which way my next appointment lies.
I made this refuge out of my indecision,
My fear of the all-involving wheels, my need
For breathing-space: also, to be the exempt
Spectator of combatant tides is flattery.
There was rest here and some illumination—
A lighthouse for the migrant, not his home.
I had felt my days fall gradually, one by one,
Like anæsthetic drops upon the mask,
Putting to sleep with their routine behaviour
The saturated will and the conscious protest,
Unfocusing the vision, till nothing remained
But the exorbitant beating of my heart,
The horror of drowning, the wish for annihilation.
Was roaring in my ears; but as through storm
One hears the unison-chorus of the surf,
I heard this Flood.
This it was that aroused me, and I saw
The clever hands all gloved to sterilize
And the slick knife that leered above my manhood.

But see me also as Noah, a man of substance,
Father of his family, contented simply
By the intimate circle of the leisured seasons:
A man of peace, one who responded always
To the time-honoured charities of hearth and home,
Preferring death to change, whose flightiest cronies
Were the grave earth and the dependable stars.
So it is you see me—one of yourselves.
Well may you look askance when such an one,
Leaving the lode and gear of his proved fortune,
Should ask concessions from a savage flood
And upon rack and ruin build his hopes.
Gentlemen, you have brought many charges against
This flood—of rapine, of sacrilege, of falsehood.
I say your follies were the source and gauge of
Its rising: falsely now you deny its roused
Desire to possess to fertilize the earth
Whose harsh and impotent husbands you were.
You looked upon these waters as an element
Necessary, subordinate, unfeatured,
God-given to be your scavengers, to ripen
Your crops and carry you to outlandish pleasures:
Their lives the head of steam that kept you running.
To me they look like men—more men than you.
Understand, these waters are here to rescue
Not to ravish the earth you so mishandled.
Their pressure is against your brittle pride,
Much greed and little competence. Already
Muscular eddies close around your nostrils
And fluent fingers are working for the death-grip.
Soon shall your bonds and pledges all be seen

A pocketful of pulp; the iridescent
Scum that you took for pure greatness, the toady
Tawdry Circumstance of your era shall
Be swept like litter out of sight and mind . . .
I was always the man who saw both sides,
The cork dancing where wave and backwash meet,
From the inveterate clash of contraries gaining
A spurious animation. Say, if you like,
A top whom its self-passions lashed to sleep
Pirouetting upon central indifference,
The bored and perfect ballet-dancer engrossed
By mere reiteration; but lately
The one that cuts a figure on thin ice.
—Who saw both sides and therefore could take neither:
A needle midway between two fields of force,
Swinging at last I point and prove the stronger
Attraction. Gentlemen, you have lost.

(Noah *turns from* Burgesses *to* Flood)

Chorus.
Now he has made his choice,
Sounding aright the profound heart of this flood at last,
Willing to meet its myriad and breath-taking embrace
Under the wind-wild sky, let him hear his two voices
That from the spirit's echoing cavern speak advice:
They tell what virtues most he needs upon this voyage,

What earth has lent and he must restore when home
he hies.

(*As the two voices speak, the* VIRTUES—*in the guise of animals*—*pass before* NOAH *and go to stand behind him.*)

FIRST VOICE.
Take first the mole, the anonymous miner,
Earth's intimate friend, lowly of demeanour:
The little genius so good at spadework,
One that was never afraid of the dark.

SECOND VOICE.
He is patience. Read him aright,
Of all virtues the soil and the root:
Remember him in the hour of disaster,
In the hour of triumph may he still be master.

FIRST VOICE.
The migrant salmon, his life fulfils
Outswimming the current, outleaping the falls:
Flashing and obstinate, he will not feed
Till the far headwaters give place to breed.

SECOND VOICE.
So be your courage, and count it rarest
To spring the highest where odds fall sheerest:
A far-traveller, a bow trained
Tense and unerring on the fruitful end.

FIRST VOICE.
Now the bull-finch, his glass-glossy breast

Draws the sunset out of the west:
Most handsome of all that lord it on leaf,
He shuns admirers and mates for life.

Second Voice.
Conspicuous be your faith, but shy
To preen it in the public eye:
Ardent and answered may you discover
Your natural constancy to friend and lover.

First Voice.
The monkey next, the infant explorer
Never tired of trial and error:
Quicksilver wit and adaptable hand,
As fire infectious, agile as wind.

Second Voice.
Let curiosity be such—
Your unappeased and sovereign itch:
A born rover that never stops
Till he has the whole world at his fingertips.

First Voice.
See the gannet, champion of flyers,
Ride unruffled the quarrelsome airs:
Then plunge out of heaven upon his prey,
Slanting and swiftsure as a sun-shot ray.

Second Voice.
Wide-winged and consummate no less
Be your singlemindedness:

Beating strongly in the heart of the quarrel,
Diving deep to take the moral.

First Voice.
Last the sheepdog, the right-hand man
Of weatherwise shepherds, resourceful of mien:
He hears the whistle and manœuvres tireless
As a night-flying pilot warned by wireless.

Second Voice.
Learn from him the directed wisdom,
The controlled initiative, the heart-felt system:
So shall you fold your fears and be
The alert equal of necessity.

First Burgess.
Traitor!

Second Burgess.
Quitter!

Third Burgess.
Cheat and parricide!

First Burgess.
Ungrateful, so pleased to prophesy our ruin

Second Burgess.
He must take the consequences, the crazy Cassandra

Third Burgess.
He loves this flood, let him go swallow it

First Burgess.
The look of the waters is growing uglier

Second Burgess.
Don't let us stand doing nothing

Third Burgess.
Remember St. George and the *Lusitania*

First Burgess.
My poison-gas outfit will make them froth

Second Burgess.
I'll pepper the upstarts soundly with my shotgun

Third Burgess.
With my mop and bucket I'll sweep them away

First Burgess.
This way!

Second Burgess.
That way!

Third Burgess.
Turn the lights on! No, turn them off!

First Burgess.
Don't contradict! There can only be one captain

Second Burgess.
Upon a ship, and that's me

THIRD BURGESS.
No, me

(*The* FLOOD *attacks the* BURGESSES)

FIRST BURGESS.
Something's gone wrong, this tide is not retreating

SECOND BURGESS.
Why can't they fight fair, it's fifty to one

THIRD BURGESS.
Save me, mother, they mean mischief

FIRST BURGESS.
Fight harder!

SECOND BURGESS.
Run faster!

THIRD BURGESS.
Pray louder and louder!

FIRST BURGESS.
They beat down our weapons, we had best retire

SECOND BURGESS.
I shall take a ticket to Southampton or Tilbury

THIRD BURGESS.
I'll climb to the top of the highest steeple

First Burgess.
Let me call at the bank first for my bearer bonds

Second Burgess.
I must rescue my horoscope and my iron ration

Third Burgess.
My malacca cane and fitted dressing-case

First Burgess.
We'll meet again

Second Burgess.
In Madeira

Third Burgess.
Or mid-ocean

(Burgesses, Flood *and* Noah *go out in a running fight*)

Chorus.
Now Noah says good-bye,
Moorings slipped and the tide floating him clear of mud-flat:
No mourning bands, no hands or streamers stretched from the quay
Make parting difficult; but at night and silently
He sheers away. Only, high in the sinking town,
One lighted window watches him into the dark, a cry
From the heart of a mistress with whom he never could share his secrets.

He says good-bye
To much, but not to love. For loving now shall be
The close handclasp of the waters about his trusting keel,
Buoyant they make his home and lift his heart high;
Among their marching multitude he never shall feel lonely.
Love is for him no longer that soft and garden sigh
Ruffles at evening the petalled composure of the senses,
But a wind all hours and everywhere he no wise can deny.

Sorrow there is in store
For all who held up to love the suave distorting mirror,
Or looked therein to be magnified; whose will was ever more
Love's rentiers to live, in make-up still admired.
Earth shall disown them. Noah shall see drowning of many,
Compounded greed with charity, let wisdom out on hire,
Made freedom a trickster and passion a sick mechanical whore.
Their pride shall corrode, their shining look in the flood be tarnished.

What is in store
For Noah and the flood we foresee: unremitting war
And undisguised on all who are mad for the personal glory.

Call not the issue certain. But let the waters beware
Of deviation, the line of least resistance; ignore
The traitor's sop; unclench those hands whose hold
on the living
Has been an ice-age. Stone are those hearts, and
only before
The stern and rhythmic assault of continual waves
will they yield.

But when the floods shall cease,
When the earth knows she is clean and sends her
love to Noah
By the raven of tenderness, when abides the dove of
peace,
Down the hillsides then shall the waters tumble
apace,
Finding their level, wearing the sun on their wide
shoulders,
To wed the radiant valleys: that reconciled em-
brace
Shall raise—taller than sunflowers and record crops
—the race
That Noah foresaw in the veiled face of the avenging
waters.

The floods shall cease,
Though forgotten never the height of their triumph,
the truth of their source.
Delight shall Noah have, as a man returning from
exile
Beholds a land greener, more great with growth and
ease

Than dreams dared imagine; but most, to live
among these
Who shared his exile, to work with, to have for
enduring fellows
All rivers, rains and seas.

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